DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 878 SO 013 558

AUTHOR Fyfe, Kenneth S.; Elwell, William C., Ed.
TITLE The Importance of Native American Studies in the Social Studies Curriculum. Occasional Paper #8.
INSTITUTION New York State Council for the Social Studies, Brockport.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 21p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American Indian Culture; American Indian Literature; *American Indian Studies; *Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; *Fused Curriculum; Guidelines; Learning Activities; *Social Studies; *United States History

ABSTRACT

This publication presents guidelines and suggestions for expanding the role of Native American studies in the present K-12 social studies curriculum. A comprehensive understanding of America's past can only be gained when the history of the Native American people is included. American history is still too often presented as the history of European discovery, settlement, and westward migration. In this context, consideration of the Native American is largely relegated to the first week of the school year or to the first chapter of the textbook. Beyond that a random selection of events, historical figures, and practical contributions may also be included in the curriculum. This narrow approach defines Native American history as having significance only as it directly relates to the European settlement and political development of America. Consequently Native Americans become a part of American history mainly during battles and treaty signings. The suggestions given for expanding the role of Native American studies in the social studies curriculum are many. Students can apply codes of behavior as found in Native American culture to specific situations in schools; they can read biographies of American Indian leaders, philosophers, and warriors; and they can be involved in a multi-media project in which they combine contemporary songs and traditional Native American music with appropriate slides and film. A bibliography for teachers concludes the publication. (Author/RM)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

BY

Kenneth S. Fyfe

1980

SO 013 558

This paper is sent to all members of New York State Council for the Social Studies, 1980-81 school year as part of the benefits of membership. Individual copies are available to non-members at a cost of $1.50.

General editor of this series of occasional papers is Dr. William C. Elwell, State University College at Brockport, Brockport, N.Y. 14420.

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Brockport, N.Y. 14420

Occasional Paper #8

Kenneth S. Fyfe
Director of Special Programs
Community College of the Finger Lakes
Canandaigua, New York

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I. RATIONALE

A comprehensive understanding of America's past can only be gained when the history of the Native American peoples is included. American history is still too often presented as the history of European discovery, settlement, and westward migration. In this context, consideration of the Native American is largely relegated to the first week of the school year or to the first chapter of the textbook. Beyond that a random selection of events, historical figures, and practical contributions may also be included in the curriculum. This narrow approach defines Native American history as having significance only as it directly relates to the European settlement and political development of America. Consequently Native Americans become a part of American history mainly during battles and treaty signings.[1]

The Native Americans have lived on the North American continent for over 20,000 years.[2] During that time they have existed within two spheres of activity. The first, and the original, encompasses all of the intra-tribal and inter-tribal relationships that existed before and after European arrival.[3] Within this sphere Native American history is an entity having its own intrinsic value as well as having a great influence on the second sphere. That second sphere is the Euro-American history of discovery, conquest and settlement so predominant in American history courses. At present consideration of the Native Americans is limited to those areas where the two spheres overlap. Failure to be aware of both spheres in their entirety is to overlook key ingredients in the <u>total</u> American experience.

The rich heritage of the Native Americans should be the shared heritage of all Americans. Including it in the teaching of American history will create a more balanced approach which allows students to see events and personalities from various points of view. Rather than the one dimensional figures that seem to float in and out of history textbooks, Native American leaders will be seen as complex individuals attempting to reconcile their beliefs and traditions with their rapidly changing social and physical environments.

Decisions of the federal government that once seemed clearly right or wrong may be open to serious questions in light of the viewpoints of everyone originally involved. Events that appeared so isolated and easily understandable will take on a new level of complexity when considered in an expanded context.

The Native American people are much more than a legacy of the past, they are a part of the present and the future. The social studies curriculum often gives the impression that the Native American vanished along with the buffalo at the close of the nineteenth century. In reality, the Native American peoples represent a growing, vibrant, and culturally awakening segment of the population and as such should justifiably be recognized. The twentieth century has also been marked by many significant policy decisions by the federal government as part of its unique relationship with the Native American communities. These decisions have had a major impact not only on the Native American population but on the country as a whole.

The Native American is so familiar and yet so misunderstood and misrepresented. From the moment of European discovery to the present, the Native American has been the subject of inaccurate characterizations. Images of the Native American as the "noble read man," "heathen savage," "drunken Indian," or "vanishing American," can be found throughout American history.[4] Judgments based on such misconceptions and false characterizations can only inhibit the overall social growth of this nation.

While there is an increasing awareness of the inaccuracy of the blatant stereotypes of the past, misunderstandings and unrealistic portrayals are still pervasive. Classroom materials as well as the popular media continue to perpetuate a less than accurate picture of the Native American community, past and present.

In an attempt to combat the negative stereotypes of the past there has been a recent tendency to present all Native Americans as overly righteous individuals. While the intent may be good, the Native American people are too diverse and complex to be so uniformly categorized. Rather than developing new stereotypes it would be far more appropriate that students begin to understand and accept Native Americans for what they were and presently are--human beings. Like any human being, a Native American is a unique individual with specific strengths, weaknesses, and behavioral characteristics. And as with any group of people there exists within the Native American community a range of behaviors.[5]

Students must learn to judge other individuals from a level of equality and not from a level of ethnocentrism. No person ought to feel superior to any other group of people. However, stereotypes continue to nurture a false sense of superiority in some and a sense of inferiority in others. For students of Native American ancestry the effect can be particularly devastating by serving to reinforce a lack of pride, self-worth and cultural identity. Thus, to reduce these stereotypes is to reduce those preconceived notions that seriously encumber human relations in this country.

Possibly the most important reason that the study of the Native Americans should be a part of the social studies curriculum in that Native American values may hold a key to the survival of this nation. Faced with ever-increasing social, environmental, and political crises that continually tear at the fabric of American life, society might possibly adopt a philosophy of living that has evolved on this continent over thousands of years. Rather than a theoretical model or an utopian social plan the Native American philosophy represents a viable alternative that has been thoroughly tested and refined.[6]

> There will come to dawn in the nations, the Indians playing their part, two realizations. The first, that their soils, waters, forests, wild life, the whole web of life which sustains them, are being wasted--often irreparably and fatally. The other, that their local community life, their local democracy, their values which are required for beauty, wisdom and strength--their very societies--are wasting away even as their natural resources are wasting. As these realizations increase, the nations will turn to their Indian societies increasingly, seeking the open secrets they have to reveal.[7]

Traditional Native American values reflect a respect for the earth, a reverence for all forms of life, an understanding of the web of life and the interrelationship of man and nature, and a commitment to individual freedom, integrity and self-development. These should be studied and considered as options for this and future generations.

This does not mean that we should encourage students to totally abandon the values and beliefs around which our present social framework is structured. The study of traditional Native American values merely offers students a variety of choices that may prove more relevant to their needs and concerns. By selectively choosing from among those and from among the dominant social values that have proven effective, students have the potential of developing a new philosophy that will contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life in this country.

In addition to helping society cope with the present, these values also provide deep insight into the past. To fully understand the Native Americans it is necessary that students become aware of the meaning and significance of tribal values and beliefs. These have guided the Native American peoples throughout their history and provide the basis for their culture.

The Native American philosophy has an important message for educators as well as for students. With public education faced with mounting criticism and serious charges from all sides, it may be time to look to the Native Americans for part of the answer. Native American values as applied to education would provide educators with an alternative educational philosophy and set of goals. They are also practical enough to have direct application in our present school system.

II. NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES: THE CHALLENGE, GUIDELINES, AND SUGGESTIONS

The Challenge

--To present Native American history as a significant element in our shared American heritage.

--To develop an accurate, truthful picture of the Native American, dispelling the stereotypes of the past and at the same time avoiding all extreme portrayals of the Native Americans.

--To present Native American values, beliefs and codes of behavior as viable alternatives for this and future generations.

The need to meet this challenge is supported by two separate evaluations:

A) A survey in Minnesota to determine the knowledge and attitudes of suburban students concerning the Native Americans concluded:

> A positive correlation was found to exist between the score a student received on the attitude section of the survey and the score the same student acquired on information questions. This may indicate that increasing learning can play a role in improving attitudes toward Native Americans.[1]

B) In a study to determine the effectiveness of a series of special lessons on Native American history and culture upon the attitude of students, Dr. Joseph Pecorano of the Maine State Department of Education concluded:

1) It was found that Indian and non-Indian children alike have little concept of the major role the Indian had played in our history and of his potential in today's society.

2) That the special lessons did have a positive effect on the attitudes of the non-Indian children.

3) That the special lessons did have a positive effect on the attitudes of the Indian children.

4) That the Indian children improved in attitude more than the non-Indian children. This indicates an improved self-image.[2]

Guidelines

--The overall approach to expanding the role of Native American studies in the present social studies curriculum should be positive in nature. Appropriate knowledge and attitudes will be the result of a course of study that strives for understanding and analysis, and avoids placing emphasis on the injustices of the past.

--The term "Indian" has traditionally been used to describe all Native American societies. This use of one general term has served to obscure the tremendous cultural diversity among the various tribes. It has also led to oversimplified generalizations that in most cases lack validity. Significant differences existed between tribes in terms of language, political sophistication and social structure.[3] Variations also occurred within, as well as between geographic regions.

Whenever possible, therefore, each tribe should be recognized as a separate social group possessing unique characteristics. Such things as tribal names, leaders, customs and traditions, and historical events should be considered within the realm of each tribe.

--While the curriculum should go beyond the traditional list of Native American contributions, it should not deny their importance as well. The Europeans that arrived on this continent borrowed liberally from among the practical innovations being used by Native societies. Contributions in such areas as agriculture, transportation, government, language, geography, arts and design, and clothing should be acknowledged and credit rightfully given.[4]

--In an effort to dispel the damaging stereotypes of the past there has been the tendency to create a new collection of totally positive stereotypes to fill the void. There is certainly a great deal to admire and emulate in Native American societies, but that admiration must be tempered by an awareness that there also existed less admirable elements and traits that can occur within any society. The social studies curriculum should strive to present a picture of the Native American based strictly on a variety of data. The development of strategies and materials can be guided by the advice of Hazel Hertzberg, "A fraudulent past is not in the long run a sustaining one and when disillusionment sets in, it is apt to be bitter."[5]

--In clarifying Indian-white relations it is important for students to realize that the image of the devious and treacherous government official or cavalry officer was not representative of all Americans. While it may be popular to portray all Americans as unscrupulous and insensitive villains, there were many, including legislators, government officials, authors, journalists and military personnel, who were outraged by the injustices and campaigned vigorously for Indian rights. In support of this viewpoint, Hazel Hertzberg writes, "We should be wary of peopling the past with stereotypes of whites which have no more validity than the stereotypes of Indians we are trying to banish. We should come to terms with the past as it was, not as we imagine it to be."[6]

--Native Americans should not be discussed as though they were an ancient relic or a museum piece inside a glass case. They are as much a part of this country's future as they are of its past. J. Russell Smith wrote, "The white man banished the Indian to lands where no man could possibly survive. The Indian fooled him. He survived."[7] The Native American population has more than tripled since 1910 and now numbers over one million. Along with this growth in sheer numbers has come a reaffirmation of the Native American cultural heritage. With renewed strength, dignity, and pride the Native American seeks to impress upon the rest of American society, "the validity of their own traditions, the merit of their own customs, the truth of their own beliefs, and the importance of remaining distinct from other societies."[8]

--Possibly the greatest potential in the study of the Native American lies in the application of ancient values and beliefs to the present. The social studies curriculum should place its primary emphasis in this area. Previously the study of material objects left by a culture was given precedence. In this approach the sophistication of a Native American society was determined solely on its level of technological achievement. With the social attributes of a culture given such secondary importance it is understandable why Native American socieities have been dismissed as having very little value or significance. The curriculum should now move beyond the study of material achievements to an indepth understanding of values and beliefs. In the words of Hazel Hertzberg, "Studying Indian cultures can help students avoid equating simplicity of technology with poverty of thought."[9]

--Classroom teachers should be aware of whether any Native American students are present in their classes. These students have particular learning habits and needs based on their culture, and present a unique challenge to the teacher. Those who wish to understand the extent of the challenge and seek effective teaching strategies should consult the work of Judith Kleinfeld of the University of Alaska.[10]

Studies in the field of Native American education may have a value far beyond their present application. Teaching strategies that have worked with Native American students may have a place in other classrooms and should be evaluated as to their applicability.

Suggestions:

--As a catalyst for student interest, a multi-media project should be actively considered. A message, specific topic, or an historical overview can be graphically displayed by combining contemporary songs and traditional Native American music with appropriate slides and film. For example, when Michael Murphey's "Geronimo's Cadillac" is played in combination with the famous picture of that scene," a very poignant message is effectively conveyed to the students. The stereotype of the humorless cigarstore Indian can be dealt with by a series of slides in combination with John Denver's "Wooden Indian." "Rocky Mountain High," also by John Denver, can be used as the basis for a discussion of Native American environmental values. Many of the Buffy St. Marie's songs concern themselves with the contemporary status of the Native American. By combining scenes of reservation life, tourist attractions, the Wounded Knee conflict or the Alcatraz occupation with those songs, the result is a graphic depiction of the Native American today.

This project can be done with one screen, projector and recorder, or with a larger variety of equipment. It can be teacher-centered or it can be a combined effort of students and teacher.

With the amount of television students are exposed to daily it is understandable that teachers would wish to avoid a film based study in order to promote the printed word. Unfortunately America has become a television based culture and students initially respond to television-like productions. This project seeks to capitalize on that reality in the hope of developing a sustaining interest that will leas to further study and discussion. By starting at a common point of familiarity students will then be able to progress to more abstract concepts and to higher levels of thought.

--The past and present can be studied and examined through the lives of specific individuals. American history is filled with remarkable men and women who clearly reflect the times in which they lived. Unfortunately social studies has sought to minimize the study of individuals in favor of larger themes and historical movements.[12] This has allowed television the opportunity to create unusual new heroes for students.

To counteract this influence the study of historical figures should once again become a part of the curriculum. In seeking to give life to the faces and names in history, social studies can provide students with needed sources of inspiration and can allow history to be presented in more personal terms.

The search for these individuals should not overlook any cultural group, but at the same time no one should be added to the curriculum just because they are from a particular group. This has been the case in the past and the result has been a double standard of acceptability with a "racial criteria for greatness and ethnic allowances for mediocrity."[13] Greatness should also not be based on the extent to which an individual from one culture successfully participated in another.[14]

An investigation of Native American history will uncover a wealth of inspirational leaders, wise philosophers and courageous warriors. The study of these individuals, both men and women, will provide great insight into the Native American culture and a new perspective of historical events.

--Students have had little choice but to accept a singular version of events in American history involving the Native American. One of the principal reasons for this is that the Native American historical tradition is oral rather than written. Oratory was a highly developed art in Native American societies. It represented one of the primary means of conveying information from generation to generation. Native American leaders spoke freely and honestly about the events that brought them increasingly in contact with the wave of European settlement. Even though a large number of these speeches have been interpreted and recorded through the years, they have been largely ignored by historians and textbook writers. This rich historical source should now be tapped as a means of providing new perspectives and unique insights within the present curriculum. Historical Native American leaders should finally be allowed to speak for themselves rather than permitting historians and social scientists to speak for them.

--The consideration of current social issues and concerns can incorporate the Native American as an effective case study of American society as a whole.[15] The problems of cultural identity, relevant education, adequate health care, equal justice, poverty, illiteracy and addiction can be examined within the context of the Native American experience. Students will begin to understand and gain some insight into present social problems through an investigation of their historical basis and development. With this background they can then evaluate remedies and formulate realistic solutions for the future.

--The use of literature can play a key role in expanding Native American studies within the present curriculum. By becoming involved with a group of people or a specific character in a book students can gain a higher level of understanding of historical events and cultural values. Through the use of appropriate selections that accurately portray the Native American as a real person, literature can become one of the most effective educational tools in counteracting stereotypes. The complexity of events in American history can be greatly increased through books that present the Native American side of the story. Native American history and social development is handled best by books that deal strictly with separate tribes. The influence of cultural values can be conveyed most effectively through the experiences of a fictional character in real-life situations. The Native American myths and legends found in literature offer a unique and colorful way of presenting history, values, beliefs, customs, and traditions. Contemporary Native American societies can be studied through the cultural conflicts experienced by Native American youth. These books have a special appeal for students facing conflicts and decisions in their own lives. For students questioning aspects of our society, literature on Native American societies will present alternatives worthy of consideration.

In each case the students' perception of the dignity and worth of the Native American and the value and importance of their history and culture will be greatly enhanced.

--An important topic for discussion is the dilemma of duty versus conscience. It was a decision faced by many of the cavalry soldiers in their confrontations with the western tribes. For example, the writings of General Howard clearly reflect the personal turmoil that he went through during his pursuit of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce tribe. As a decision that almost everyone has to face at some point, it can be discussed in class within this context. It is an excellent place for utilizing a moral dilemma teaching strategy.

--Native American names and characters have always had a popular role in commercial advertising. From the days of the cigarstore Indian to the present, the Native American image has been used to convey an impression or a message. Unfortunately the image has often been based on the needs of the advertiser rather than the need for historical accuracy. As a means of studying Native American stereotypes, such advertisements in magazines, newspapers, and on television can form the basis of an inquiry unit. For example, consider a particular advertisement in light of the following questions: What message is the advertiser attempting to convey by using Native American characters or names? Is it an accurate interpretation of Native American culture? In what ways is it an accurate or inaccurate representation? Does it represent one of the classical stereotypes? How would the Native American community view such a representation? How can we find answers to these questions?

--A reverence for the earth and an understanding of the web of life are basic values of Native American cultures. The study of these significant cultural elements should begin with a comparative study of the values and beliefs concerning nature held by the students. This can be done by placing the names or pictures of certain animals, plants and insects before the class. Students will then be asked to write a $\pm$ on their paper if they feel very positive toward an item, an $-$ if they have negative feelings, and an o if it does not generate any strong feelings. A discussion should then follow to determine the basis for the various responses and the overall consensus for each item. The question then to be explored is how these same items would be perceived in the Native American culture. A comparative analysis of the two sets of responses will serve to clarify the differences between modern society's view of nature and that of the Native American. This comparison can then be expanded to a consideration of prominent environmental issues from a Native American viewpoint.

This study will present students with an alternative way of thinking and feeling about their natural environment and hopefully will enhance their perception of the value of all forms of life.

--Native American oratory represents an excellent resource for exploring cultural values. Selected examples can convey to the students the interest, concern and understanding on the part of the Native American for their natural environment and for their relationships with others. It will provide insight into what they considered to be important in their lives personally and in the collective lives of the Native American people. It may also lead to an understanding of how Native Americans perceived themselves in relation to all other living things on earth.

--For Native American cultural values to be understood by students, they should be placed within the context of experiences with which students are familiar.[16] For instance, by applying codes of behavior as found in Native American cultures to specific situations in school, students can begin to vicariously experience the differences that exist between cultures. This process of application can include any

aspect of life that would be appropriate for placing students in a position of assessing a situation from a Native American cultural point of view.

--A Native American philosophy of education should be seriously considered by educators as a realistic alternative to the present philosophical basis of our educational system. A philosophy and set of educational goals from a Native American viewpoint are accurately summarized by Jack D. Forbes in the National Council for the Social Studies publication, Teaching Ethnic Studies, Concepts and Strategies.[17]

--A wealth of resources exists for the teacher seeking to expand Native American studies within the present social studies curriculum. Whether they are used in conjunction with the suggestions and ideas presented here or with others, the most important thing is that these resources be fully utilized.

--A general set of guidelines for incorporating a topic such as Native American studies into the social studies curriculum is outlined in the Position Statement of the NCSS Task Force on Ethnic Studies Curriculum Guidelines.[18]

FOOTNOTES AND SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. FOOTNOTES

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[11]See Alistair Cooke, America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 244-245.

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[16]Kay Hinkley and Diana Holzmueller, "It Works for us! A Resource List of Teaching of Ideas and Materials on Athabascan Culture," Resources in Education 10 (November, 1975) ED 108-902:9.

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In addition to developing this Rationale and set of Guidelines and Suggestions, Mr. Fyfe has prepared a comprehensive list of sources and materials for teachers. The list is 47 pages long and contains more than 600 items. Items include:

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Arts and Crafts - guilds, cooperatives and commercial sources of crafts and arts.
Posters - individuals, ideas, and statements of resistance.
Audio Resources - songs and sounds of Native American groups.
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